

GATCOMBS



BANJO & GUITAR

GAZETTE

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THE ORIGIN OF THE BANJO.

Chicago, Oct. 15th, 1888.

E. B. GATCOMB, ESQ.,

Dear Sir:—Some time ago I promised to write an article for your Journal concerning the origin of the Banjo.

Early in the forties I heard, for the first time, the banjo played by Mr. Earl Pierce, the famous comedian who was then connected with E. P. Christy's Minstrels in New York City. It happened that Mr. Pierce came to visit his brother, Warren Pierce in Providence, R. I., (my native place) who worked in the same shop with me and was a great friend and associate of mine. Warren introduced me to his brother Earl, who one evening invited us to hear him play the banjo. I became infatuated with what I considered a wonderful instrument, and the several pieces that he played thrilled me with delight. It was the first time I had ever seen a banjo, and I watched him closely and took the first opportunity to examine its construction. The dimensions I simply guessed at, being ashamed to ask him for them outright. I secretly determined to make one for myself which I accomplished before Earl's departure. It was as near like his as I could imagine, and, indeed, I thought it was perfect. I was totally unacquainted with the strings and did not know what to get, but finally strung it up in a manner which I thought would do. I proudly showed it to Earl, who took it in his hands and closely examined it. Imagine my chagrin when he smilingly said: "Are you left handed?" I told him I was not. He said: "The banjo is well made and I think fair toned, but you have the thumb string on the wrong side of the neck." My mortification was very great when I saw the error. He told me to make another neck and that the rest was all right. Then he showed me his and explained to me what strings to get for it, and turning to a piano he taught me in a short time how to tune by that.

I made another neck, but he had gone to New York before its completion.

I soon learned to play a tune but it was some time before I heard another banjo played and the player was Tom Briggs, who was then filling an engagement in Providence. Not being acquainted with him, I went every night to hear him and watched his right hand very close. I obtained the motion of his thumb and finger and became familiar with the sound of the notes which were firmly fixed in my memory. I practiced faithfully night and day and soon became quite proficient, in fact, as good as any in the business, perhaps at that time.

I do not know who the first man was to introduce the banjo to the public, but during my engagement in Chicago in October, 1888, I became acquainted with Mr. Charles L. Harris, an actor, a leading man with Lotta. One evening we were sitting in a cafe, much frequented by professionals, and during our conversation the origin of the banjo was discussed. Mr. Harris favored me with a poem, the recital of which convinced me that he knew the origin of that much admired instrument. After setting our glasses down he proceeded as follows:—

I.

Go 'way fiddle. Folks is tired of hearin' you
squawkin.
Keep silence for yo' betters. Don't yon hear de
banjo talkin?
'Bout de "Possum's Tail" she's gwine ter lecture.
Ladies listen.
'Bout de hair what isn't dar, and why de
hair is missing.

II.

"Dar's gwine ter be an overflow" said Noah
looking solemn.
For Noah took de Picayune and read de
River Colun.
And so he got his hands to work a cleaning
timber patches.
And 'lowed he's gwine to build a boat to beat the
steamer "Natchez."

III.

And Noah had done cotched a lot of every kind
of "Beastes".
Of all the shows a traveling he beat 'em all
to pieces.
He had a Morgan bolt and several head of
Jersey cattle
And drove 'em board de ark as soon's he heard de
thunder rattle.

IV.

And another fall of rain, it come so
awful heavy,
De river riz immediately and busted through
de Levee.
De people all was drowned out 'cept Noah
and de critters.
And de men he hired to work de boat and de one
to mix de bitters.

V.

De ark she kept a sailin', and a sailin', and
a sailin',
And de Lion got his dander up a like to break
de palin.
De "serpints" hissed, de "Painters" yelled and what
with all de bussin
You couldn't hardly hear de mate a bossin
round and cussin.

VI.

Now Ham, de only nigger dat was runnin
in de packet.
Got lonesome in de barber shop and couldn't
stand de racket.
And so for to amuse himself he steamed some
wood and bent it.
And soon he had a banjo made, *De fust dat
was invented.*

VII.

He wet some leather, stretched it on, made de
bridge and screws and apron
And fitted in a proper neck, 'twas very long
and tapering.
He took some tin and twisted him a thimble
for to ring it,
And den de mighty question riz, how was he
gwine to string it?

[CONTINUED ON SECOND PAGE.]

GATCOMB'S
BANJO & GUITAR GAZETTE,

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Advertisements under the heading "New Music," one insertion.
: lines, 50 cents; additional lines 12 1-2 cents per line.

Press of G. M. Tuck, Boston.

VIII.

Well, de Possum had as fine a tail as dis dat
I'm a singin;
De hair so long and thick and strong, just fit
for banjo stringin.
Dat nigger shaved 'em off as short as wash day
dinner graces.
And sorted of 'em by de size from little E's to
basses.

IX.

He strung her, tuned her, struck a jig, 'twas
 "Never mind de weather."
 She sound like forty 'leven bands a playin
 all together.
 Some went to pattin, some to dancin, Old Noah
 called de figgers
 And Ham jest sot and knocked de "chune"
 de happiest of niggers.

Now since dat time, (it's powerful strange,)
 dars not de slightest showin
 Of any hair upon de Possum's tail
 a growing.
 And curious too, dat nigger's ways, his people
 never lost 'em,
 For where you find de nigger, dars de
 Banjo and de Possum.

With best wishes and kind regards,
I remain yours sincerely,
GEORGE H. COES.

PROGRESS.

MR. EDITOR :

It was predicted by the wise acres, when the banjo craze started, some two years or more ago, that it was a mush-room growth; but their vaperings were, like mist before a summer sun: the mush-room has grown into magnificent proportions, and its beauty and sweetness is tempting the epicures of every nation.

The London Truth says: "I can well imagine the feelings of the New Orleans darkey, as he existed before the war, if he could only visit a London drawing room in full season, and hear the young scions of aristocracy twanging the once dended 'plantation' instrument in the ears of damsels of high estate; and the most exalted males in this realm throwing aside those troubles which the inhabitants of the greater republics are pleased to consider the cares of state, and giving a boudoir performance on the banjo, before the Princess and their daughters."

I am informed by those who ought to know, that the Prince of Wales, like his relative, the Czar of Prussia, is no mean performer on the Banjo; that he can, after returning from the opera, pick out the tunes on the banjo with astonishing facility. Mr. Gladstone himself, is said to favor the instrument, which also solaces the few intervals of leisure in which other brain-workers are able to indulge."

Here in Washington, I am told, the first lady in the land, the present incumbent of the White House, is learning to play; Senator Eustis' daughter is a very fine performer on the banjo, and I could mention many more among the elite of Washington who are proud of their ability to manipulate the banjo strings.

The members of the Chinese Legation are laying aside their quaint little moon guitars and taking up our silvered tongued banjos; and they show a decided proficiency in the finger manipulation, and I suppose we will be exporting some banjos to China, to aid some Chinese concerts very soon, as I do not think there will be a first-class concert anywhere upon our Globe, that will be complete without a banjo.

The papers of every city are now and then interspersing through their news columns, extracts and talks of prominent players; the people at large are getting a better understanding of the capabilities of the instrument. And during my sojourn in the plains we had a performer of the banjo with us, and when in the evening, after the days' work was completed and the tin plates washed and placed in the mess-chest, the old Banjo brought out of its resting place, and tuned, and the familiar airs played, that brought back the memories of the old home and inmates, we could almost revere the hand and instrument that could keep those memories so fresh and green. And even poor Lo who was often a part of the audience, would show more than ordinary interest, and the stolid countenance would lighten up with pleasure; and he would give vent to the guttural grunt of satisfaction when some part of the music would reach a weak spot.

Another evidence of its growing popularity and its intention to become a fixture in the musical family, is that the old time \$10 and \$12 instruments are not in such demand, but the better grades are being sold very extensively and even fabulous prices are being paid; and the little *Gems* of beauty are placed in the most conspicuous places, instead of being relegated to some hiding place, for fear of being ostracised by your fashionable friend, for evincing a taste for that detested Negro and Minstrel instrument.

It is now in order for that Yale professor to retract his edict against the banjo, or he will become a relic to be deposited in the Smithsonian Institute among the fossils and petrified mummies of the ancients; and music will have to leave out the notes and clefs and sign himself the staff, and that must be a broken one, for he cannot lean on that with safety, unless he can resurrect some less favored instrument to deride and vent his spleen on.

E. G. HARBAUGH,

E. G. HARBAUGH,
Washington, D. C.

EDITOR BANJO & GUITAR GAZETTE:—

In your issue for September and October, Mr. Harbaugh had an interesting article on the first page. Permit me to say, that Byron cites the case of a man who died for his country, and had his name spelled wrong in the Gazette. I forget the verse, but he says "His name was Grove and was written Grose." Think of it! Fame, with a big F, should hand down a man's name as he spells it or his individuality is lost.

I cannot say whether it was Mr. Harbaugh or the printer who made "Old Joe Sweeney" several times appear as "Joe Swerney", but I incline to lay it to the printer, for any man who knows anything of the history of the banjo is acquainted with "Old Joe."

Some years before there were any "Nigger Minstrels", Sweeney came North with a circus and played his banjo in the ring. This was about 1845. I have the correct dates laid away, but write from memory.

Sweeney was a personal acquaintance of mine in 1850, and, as he only played in what is now technically called "banjo style", (i. e. with thumb and first finger; "stroke" may be a more correct term,) he passed out of the profession as the banjo improved in compass. Now this last phrase needs explanation. In Sweeney's time no player went below the fifth fret; hence the compass of the instrument was limited more than at present.

"Old Joe" wasn't more than thirty then. He afterwards left the circus business and, during the war of 1861-65, was an attache of some Confederate General, which one I never could learn. At the first charge on Petersburg, June 16, 1864, I was captured and, after working all my Northern friends for an exchange, I thought of "Old Joe Sweeney" and tried to get his address. By the process of elimination, I decided that he was not with certain generals, for, like Stonewall Jackson, they had no music in their souls. I failed to discover who he solaced with his jigs which used to make my hair stand on end. I have never learned to this day. If any one can give me the address of "Old Joe Sweeney," I will go down into "Ole Virginny" to see him.

FRED. MATHER.

FRED. MATHER.

THRUM-TE-TUM TUM.

Mr. John Davis, of this city, may be called the pioneer of banjo-playing in Western Massachusetts. It is fifteen years or more since he took to "picking on de ole banjo," chiefly for his own amusement at first. When he began there were not more than two or three persons in the city who played the banjo at all, and those were colored men. He used to play occasionally at entertainments, and as there was a young lady who played with him, the thing was quite a novelty, and proved a taking feature.

"I used to be dreadfully ashamed of it, though," says Mr. Davis. "The banjo was considered a low kind of instrument, only fit for drumming plantation jigs, and when I had to take it out of doors I covered it up as well as I could, and slipped along the back streets where I would be the least seen. I had some pupils—young fellows who wanted to learn to play a few tunes by ear—but banjo-playing

was nothing like the study and science it is now."

It was about seven years ago that the banjo craze struck New York, and all at once the banjo rose to the top notch of fashion, for ladies as well as men. The rage hit Springfield at about the same time. Mr. Davis' first lady pupil was a prominent society girl, and she at once set the style to learn the banjo. From that time he had his hands full. He found it necessary to give up his other employment and devote himself wholly to the banjo.

Formerly there was no music written for the banjo, and banjoists had to create and perfect the science for themselves. Now the new music comes arranged for the banjo as well as piano, and there is an unlimited assortment from which to select.

So far from being a transient whim of fashion, banjo-playing seems to increase in popularity. Few of the students here study to become professionals or teachers, the fashion prevailing chiefly among the scions of wealthy families, who play chiefly for the entertainment of themselves and their friends. The number of ladies and gentlemen who devote themselves to the banjo is about equally divided. Lately a great many children, both boys and girls, are beginning to play, and they prove, as a rule, apter and quicker pupils than adults.

The first lessons on the banjo are devoted to practice of the scales, but soon simple tunes are alternated with the exercises, to make the study more interesting. In three months a tolerably apt pupil is able to play with a fair degree of correctness, and from that time can steadily improve and perfect himself with practice. Quick, lively tunes, schottisches and polkas, are first given. Of course, some classes of music are not adapted to the banjo.

"I am learning something new of the possibilities of the banjo every day," Mr. Davis says. "Sometimes I get a new idea from a pupil, and when I do I don't hesitate to tell him so. I am studying the instrument constantly, and I know that I have a good deal more to learn yet."

It is remarkable what a popular feature a banjo duet or quartet is, at almost any kind of entertainment. Good banjo-playing is sure to meet with rounds of applause when the most scientific execution on other instruments falls flat.

A player needs to buy a good instrument. It is a mistake to suppose that any kind of a banjo will do to begin with. Nothing so surely discourages a learner as a poor instrument. The prices of banjos vary according to their tone and make. They range from \$5 up to \$100, and some of the higher priced are very elaborately decorated and finished. A handsome and fine-toned "professional" instrument can be obtained for \$40. The low-priced banjos are spoken of as "store tubs" by teachers. Mr. Davis' concert banjo is a large and handsome instrument, with flowers and vines carved on the handle, and shines like the gilded dome of the Hub.

Mr. Davis' largest classes are in this city, and he has a number of pupils in Holyoke and other towns. He teaches on an average

from 45 to 60 pupils, and as they generally take lessons separately, he is kept extremely busy.

There are two or three others in the city who devote part of their time to teaching the banjo. Worcester has one expert teacher, and there are two in Hartford.

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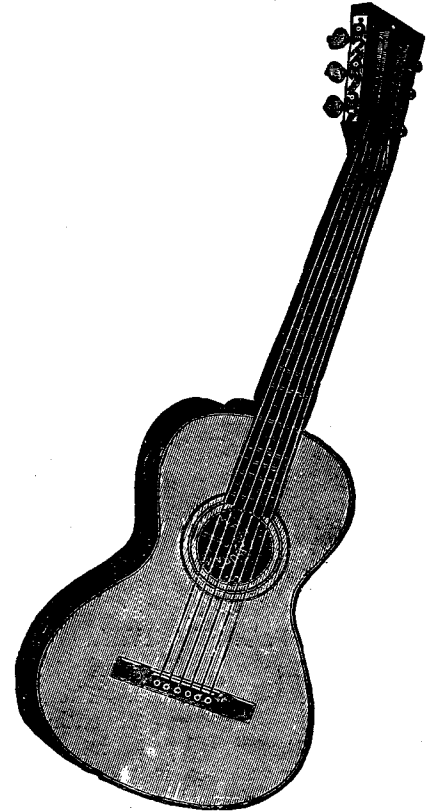
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MR. F. O. PERCIVAL.

Perhaps no City in the Union can boast of more banjo talent than Boston. The instrument is very popular and attracts enthusiastic audiences whenever played in concert. Among its many votaries is the gentleman whose portrait is above printed.

He is a native of the Granite State, having been born in Lake Village, N. H., June 23, 1852, where he resided until the age of ten years, when he moved to Boston, which has been his home ever since.

He commenced the study of the banjo with Mr. G. L. Lansing in 1885, and made such rapid progress that by the advice of his tutor he commenced teaching about one year ago with great success. He divides his time between his studio at the South End and the establishment of L. B. Gatcomb & Co. This latter was rendered necessary by the strain which Messrs. Shattuck and Babb encountered in their endeavors to handle all the pupils which flock to this place.

Of a kind and genial nature and possessing all the qualifications which are necessary in a good instructor and a hard worker, he is entitled to the share of public esteem which he has acquired.



The Manchester Banjo, Guitar and Mandolin Club has been organized as follows:—B. A. Bloomey, Banjeaurine and Mandolin; W. E. Burbank, Banjeaurine and Mandolin; W. H. Sullivan, Guitar and Vocalist; F. E. Straw, Guitar and Harmonica; W. M. Tessier, Banjo and Vocalist.

We wish to acknowledge the receipt of an elegant photograph of this club, and to express the hope that they will have much success.

Edward Walsh writing from Quebec, says: "Your Gazette is grand. It is steadily improving and is worth four times the price you ask for it." The Gazette is increasing in circulation wonderfully. No banjoist can afford to be without it.

Concerning the Darkies' Patrol, by G. L. Lansing, we have a letter from William Sullivan, of Montreal, Can., wherein he says that it is grand, and also expresses his great pleasure with the Mill Dam Galop, by A. A. Babb. He also says that he expects to make a great hit with both of them.

We notice with much pleasure, the flattering notice which the Bangor Daily Commercial of Sept. 29th, gives to the concert given by Miss Helen A. Friend in Fairfield, Me. It says that the Dobson Banjo and Guitar Orchestra, composed of 12 of the leading young people of the village furnished music, both surprising and enjoyable. While concerning the artistic efforts of Miss Friend its praise is unstinted.

Mr. Alfred Chenet has published some new Guitar studies, which the reputation of this gentleman should guarantee to be first-class. His address will be found in the Teachers' column.

We are in receipt of a letter from Chicago, informing us of the severe illness of Mr. E. M. Hall. He has congestion of the blood vessels at the base of the brain. We sincerely hope that he will have a speedy recovery.

Mrs. M. Rogers has written us a very pleasant letter from Cleveland, Ohio, brimfull of happy prognostications for the coming winter. She reports great enthusiasm among Cleveland banjoists. Concerning the Gazette she says: "I like it better than any musical paper I receive."

Mr. C. C. Bertholdt, played Lansing's "Old Folks at Home" and a duett with Mr. Frederick Hashagen, Shattuck's Invincible Guard March" at the Pickwick Theatre, St. Louis, Mo., with great success. Mr. Bertholdt is agent for Gatcomb's celebrated banjos.

Mr. Shattuck, of the Ideal Club, has lately purchased of Thompson & Odel a Washburn Concert Grand Guitar. It is a beautiful instrument, and reflects great credit on the manufacturers. Messrs. T. & O. are sole New England agents. The Ideal Club use the Washburn Mandolins and Guitars exclusively.

Messrs. Goldby & Shepard, of Paterson, N. J., publish a series of studies for the banjo which are highly endorsed. See their advertisement on another page.

FALSE STRINGS.

To prove that a string is false. Make the 12th harmonic, then the octave at the same fret by pressing the string down on the fingerboard. The end of the string which is largest will be flat of the octave, while the small end will be sharp. To remedy this, TIE the KNOT at the SMALL END of the string. As the strain at the end of the string which is attached to the peg is the greatest, it will thereby even out as it is brought up to its proper pitch.

The great success of last season with the Boston Ideal Club, the full title of which is "Episode Militaire—the March Past, or the Passing Review," has just been published for the banjo by D. W. Reeves, of Providence, R. I. It is, without doubt, one of the most effective pieces ever written for the instrument, and is entirely fresh and new. It was composed by H. B. Dodworth, (the leader of Dodworth's celebrated New York band) especially for concerts, and has been jealously guarded by him ever since. It created such a favorable impression wherever played that it was judged the proper time to put it in banjo form.

Banjo solo, 40 cents; two banjos, 50 cents. For sale by L. B. Gatcomb & Co.

While in Philadelphia a short time since, we had the pleasure of calling on Mr. Otto Albrecht, the popular teacher of Banjo and Guitar in that city. We found him in pleasant rooms, finely located, and from the number of compositions shown us we conclude that he makes the most of his time.

Just out. It will make a sensation—the great Banjo Song and Chorus, "Mrs. Didde-mus' Party," as sung all over the world by Schoolcraft and Coes. Every banjoist wants it.

Mr. and Mrs. B. E. Shattuck are instructing a much larger number of banjo pupils in Haverhill than last season. They make Friday the day for their work there, and F. W. Peabody's music store their headquarters.

Mr. H. W. Harris, of the Ideal Club, has a large class of Mandolin and Guitar pupils in Haverhill, and through his patient and conscientious teaching, a large number of young ladies and gentlemen of that city have become quite proficient. Mr. Harris teaches at F. W. Peabody's music store on Fridays.

The great Banjo Concert to be given by the Boston Ideal Club at Tremont Temple, Boston, on Tuesday evening, Dec. 11, 1888, promises to eclipse the one given a year ago by this Club. There will be an orchestra of 75 picked banjo, banjeaurine, and guitar players, who will render the musical composition which was played with such great success last season by the Ideal Club, viz.: "The March Past," or the Passing Review, written by Dodworth, the leader of the celebrated New York band bearing his name. It is a patrol, published for the banjo by D. W. Reeves, of Providence, R. I. (whose advertisement can be found in this issue), and is very pretty and effective.

There will also be a Mandolin orchestra of about 25, which, together with the other fine attractions, will serve to make it another important epoch in the banjo world. Such a concert is of the greatest benefit and importance to the banjo. It keeps alive the interest in the instrument, and stimulates the young player to greater efforts. There is an immense advance sale, and our advice is, to any one contemplating purchasing tickets, get them now, or there will be none left.

We have recently engaged the services of Mr. Geo. F. Palmer, one of Boston's finest banjo makers. The addition of Mr. Palmer to our already large corps of finished workmen, makes our facilities for turning out high grade work most complete.

"MARGARITA."

Arr. for Guitar by GEORGE BARKER.

GUITAR.

Adagio.

The musical score for "Margarita" is written for guitar in C major, 2/4 time, and marked *Adagio*. It consists of six staves. The first staff contains the melody with fingerings (0, 1, 2, 3, 4) and a capo on the second fret. The subsequent staves provide harmonic accompaniment using various chords and arpeggios, with some staves featuring double bar lines and repeat signs. The piece concludes with a final chord on the sixth staff.

THE MINSTREL BOY.

Con Spirito.

The musical score for "The Minstrel Boy" is written for guitar in D major, 2/4 time, and marked *Con Spirito*. It consists of four staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is characterized by eighth and sixteenth notes. The accompaniment is provided in the lower staves with chords and arpeggios. The piece ends with a double bar line on the fourth staff.

SIMPSON'S FUNNY LITTLE JIG.

By T. A. SIMPSON.

BANJO.

PIANO.

5 Br..... 4*

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is a single melodic line with various ornaments and fingerings. The bottom two staves are a grand staff (treble and bass clef) with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The music is written in a style that suggests a 19th-century manuscript.

5 Br..... 4*.....

D.C.

D.C.

VINNIE POLKA.

By F. O. PERCIVAL.

To Master Vincent Taboll,

Boston, Mass.

BANJO.

5* B. 3*

7th Barre....

5* B.....

5* B....

2* B.....

3* B.....

5* B.....

Bass String.

3* B..... 5* B..... 10* B..... 5* B.....

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Fits any Banjo, never cuts the strings, keeps pressure on the bridge even if hoop is not pulled down, thus preventing the bridge sliding from side to side when playing. **Price, \$1.50.**

The "Pipophone," a beautiful imitation of Swiss Bells, in elegant wooden case, \$30.00. My Royal Diamond Banjo strings are used by every professional, \$1.50 per bundle of 30.

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By B. E. SHATTUCK, composer of the Celebrated "Invincible Guard March."

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No. 1., 24. Nickel protector bracket, German Silver rim and raised frets,Price, \$5.00.

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No. 3. Roger's best head on hard wire, Grooved hoop ebony fingerboard, fancy pearl inlaid German Silver rim, White pegs and tailpiece,Price, \$10.

No. 4. Roger's best head on hard wire, extra heavy, Grooved hoop, German Silver rim, extra thick, ebony fingerboard inlaid with mother-of-pearl, Champion pegs and tailpiece,Price, \$15.

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